
THE LAST RITES OF AMITABHA

怎樣念佛往生不退成佛

**HOW TO BECOME IRREVERSIBLY
ESTABLISHED UPON THE PATH TO BODHI
BY RECITING AMITA BUDDHA'S NAME**

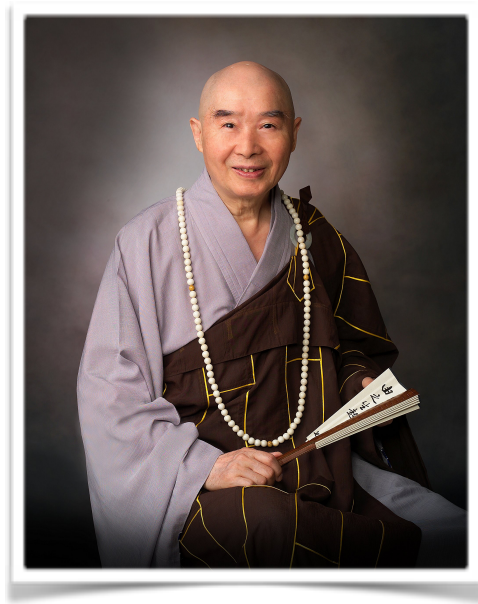


TRANSLATED BY BRIAN CHUNG

2016 EDITION

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MASTER CHIN KUNG'S FOREWORD



ESTEEMED FELLOW BUDDHISTS,

THIS HUMBLE HANDBOOK IS AN EXHORTATION OF
UTMOST IMPORTANCE FOR THE PURE LAND SCHOOL.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE THE BENEFITS
OUTLINED IN THE BOOK'S TITLE IS CLEARLY WITHIN
THE REACH OF EVERYONE. THUS, WHENEVER
CULTIVATION IS DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH FAITH
AND UNDERSTANDING, EVEN IF TENS OF THOUSANDS
WERE TO CULTIVATE, NONE WOULD FAIL TO ATTAIN
PURE LAND REBIRTH. HOW WONDERFUL! HOW VERY
WONDERFUL! THENCE, MAY WE ALL TROTH OUR
MUTUAL WILL AND FAITH TOWARDS THE EXALTED
ASPIRATION ILLUMINATED BY THIS BOOK!

-VENERABLE MASTER CHIN KUNG

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Last Rites of Amitabha (怎樣念佛往生不退成佛) is a collection of important last rites, instructions and principles found within the 飭終須知 (Precautions for the Eve of Death) by the Venerable Shi Liao (世了法師), who wrote it under the initiative of Dharma Master Xi Zhen (西震法師), and the人生最大的一件事 (*The Most Important Matter in Life*) by Upasaka Yu Din Xi (余定熙居士). Thus, this handbook is the fruition of their noble efforts to make profound and ancient Buddhist wisdom understandable to the general public.

The eve of death represents an uniquely critical juncture in the cycle of birth and death. Proper precautions and skillful supportive chanting during this time can help even persons of little wisdom and severe karmic burdens achieve Pure Land rebirth, and thus become Buddhas forever free from suffering. Therefore, the rites, instructions, precautions and wisdom contained herein must be studied by all.

I undertook to translate this Dharma book upon the request of a Vietnamese Upasika, who desired an English edition for the benefit of the elderly residents of a nursing home. Upasaka Andy Kao of Queensland personally relayed her excellent request to me. Thus, I thank them both for their diligent efforts in propagating the Dharma, and for giving me this opportunity to contribute to their noble efforts through the translation of this text. Therefore, The Last Rites of Amitabha contains the essence of the teachings and wisdom found within the Chinese edition, skillfully compacted and streamlined, to facilitate easy understanding and straightforward implementation by readers of any age, health situation and walk of life.

Merit Dedication

**May the merits and virtues accrued from this work
adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the Four Kinds of Kindness above,
and relieve the sufferings of those
in the Three Paths below.
May those who see and hear of this,
bring forth the heart
of understanding and compassion and,
at the end of this life,
be born together in the Land of Ultimate Bliss**

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Brian Chung

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DISCOURSE ON THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF THOSE RECITING THE BUDDHA'S NAME DURING THE MOMENT OF DEATH

When Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the Amitabha Sutra while dwelling in Savatthi's Jeta Grove, he praised the exalted and wondrously adorned Western Pure Land. In the sutra, it is categorically stated that all the Buddhas of the six directions—such as the Light of the Sun and Moon Buddha of the South and the Brahma Sound Buddha of the Upper World—commend in unison the inconceivable merit adorning the Pure Land of Amitabha.

Thus, rebirth in the Pure Land is no small matter, for it is an opportunity of unmatched significance—praised by every Buddha without exception. Anyone who truly strives for Pure Land rebirth and diligently recites with unwavering faith will be reborn there. This is an unequivocal fact bolstered by numerous real life cases, therefore, do not entertain any doubts.

Question: If it is indeed true that all who recite the Buddha's name can attain rebirth in Pure Land, why is it that many cultivators (both lay and ordained) who regularly recite and declare their intention to be reborn in the Pure Land become confused at death, and remain trapped in the Samsara?

Answer:

Such failures are caused by the inadequacy of their causes and conditions. If at the eve of death, the causes and conditions are complete, then it does not matter whether tens, hundreds, thousands or millions of people cultivate, all will attain rebirth in Pure Land.

Question: What are causes and conditions?

Answer:

If a cultivator can, up to his last breath, maintain unwavering faith in Amitabha, resolve to be reborn in Pure Land and be diligent in reciting Amitabha's name, he does not lack causes. Likewise, if someone who neglects the Dharma during his life meets good counsel on the eve of death, and if he can then faithfully yearn to be reborn in Pure Land, such faith, resolve and action also represent adequate causes. Amita Buddha's omnipresent vows, protection and blessings represent conditions. Moreover, the assistance rendered by supportive chanters is another favorable condition.

Question: What is the principle behind the fact that those with complete causes and conditions at the moment of death can achieve Pure Land rebirth?

Answer:

The principle is that of reciprocity. When a cultivator who is on the verge of death recites Amita Buddha's name with true faith and unwavering resolve for such a rebirth, he is sincerely accepting Amita Buddha's open invitation. The name being recited represents the benefactor (i.e. conditions), and his willingness to recite with resolve and faith shows that he is ready to become a sincere beneficiary (i.e. causes). And so, the Buddha appears as a response to those causes and purifies the heart of the willing. Whenever causes and conditions mutually interact, rebirth in the Pure Land is assured.

Question: If a cultivator on the verge of death simply could not gather together adequate causes and conditions, is he completely deprived of the chance to be reborn in Pure Land?

Answer:

Such cases can be divided into three types:

1) Causes present but conditions lacking:

People who regularly cultivate Buddha name recitation with faith and resolve, though perhaps not as skillfully as they should, could rally the necessary causes for Pure Land rebirth on the eve of death.

However, at that time, various difficulties may set upon them. These obstacles include severe illness, anxieties, lack of supportive chanters, and ignorant relatives who trouble them by howling with grief. They yearn in vain for their family and relatives' solemn support in seeking Pure Land rebirth. Thus, even though they could have mustered the causes necessary, the want of favorable conditions has doomed their initiative. They are deprived of their chance for Bodhi and the bliss of Pure Land by their own impulsive relatives.

2) Causes absent but conditions present

There are some people whose faith and dedication towards the Dharma are superficial and weak throughout their lives. Nevertheless, they have the good fortune of wise and calm family members and good counsel at the time of death. However, worldly temptations confuse their hearts and provokes maudlin attachment to grandchildren, property and so forth. Thus, they squander their last moments on emotion and do not leave the Samsara.

3) Causes and conditions both absent

Lastly, there are those who cultivate only for temporal karmic blessings such as wealth, long life and security. And so, when the eve of death approaches, they descend into fear. If they are ill, they recite Amita Buddha's name for health and recovery, and not for Pure Land rebirth. When it becomes obvious that death is inevitable, they become fretful and

desperately cry out to the Heavens for a reprieve. Their family members and relatives are either ignorant of the Dharma or have only superficial understanding of its profound spiritual principles. Thus, not only are they unable to render wise counsel or offer supportive chanting, they even heap unbearable anxieties upon the soon to be deceased through their wild expressions of grief and outbursts of sorrow. Therefore, such persons are trapped and cannot resist being towed into the three evil realms by their passions and confusions.

Question: How then shall we muster the causes and conditions for Pure Land rebirth when we are about to pass?

Answer:

Ideal cultivators are those who possess abundant good roots. Regularly, they sincerely recite Amitabha's name with true faith and enduring resolve for Pure Land rebirth. As they are masters of cultivation, their faith and resolve are of the utmost sincerity. Therefore, they do not need supportive chanting or wise counsel during their last moments. They naturally carry on as they have always done, reciting with faith and resolve, untainted by any undesirable attachments or manifestations of ill fortune and emotion. Their every thought abides calmly in the exalted name of Amitabha. According to the Amitabha Sutra, those who recite with one heart unconfused are swiftly reborn in the Pure Land. Such cultivators are the epitome of that standard ; their causes and conditions align perfectly.

Second to the above are cultivators who regularly recite with true faith and lasting resolve, but are unable to attain full mastery. When death approaches, their resolve for Pure Land rebirth strengthens even in the face of illness and adversity. Moreover, their relatives and family members are wise, disciplined and understand the importance of the moment of death. Thus, they remain calm and are restrained in their emotions. Besides, such cultivators can also count upon the supportive chanting and comforting counsel of virtuous friends.

Thus, their every thought abides in the name of Amitabha all the way until their last breath. As the proper causes are present at that final critical moment, the Buddha responds and guides them into the Pure Land.

Lastly, there are those who are completely ignorant of the Pure Land teachings throughout their lives. However, on the eve of death, they are furnished with wise counsel and guidance by virtuous friends. They may be informed of Amita Buddha's 48 Great Vows, or of the wondrous and pure conditions of the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Thus, they become joyful and are converted. They immediately become faithfully resolute in seeking Pure Land rebirth and diligently hold Amita Buddha's name. Moreover, their relatives and family members have also been instructed by the same virtuous friends on the importance of remaining well composed and refraining from expressions of grief. As the moment of death approaches, their faithful and resolute mindfulness (i.e. causes) of Amitabha (i.e. conditions) surpasses even that of a son's pining for his beloved mother. As both causes and conditions are present, they are swiftly guided by the Buddha's benevolent hand into the Pure Land.

In all three of the above cases, both causes and conditions were mutually present at the last moment of life. Thus, Pure Land rebirth did not escape them.

Question: How is it possible for someone who has been ignorant of the Dharma for his entire life to be reborn in Pure Land after being converted in the nick of time? And also for his family to refrain from emotional displays of grief simply because they have been advised against doing so?

Answer:

As mentioned before, as long as both causes and conditions are present at the moment of death, Pure Land rebirth can be achieved. Moreover, the reason such persons were ignorant of the Dharma is that no one had informed them before. Thus, if they have the good fortune of meeting and

heeding wise counsel at such a critical juncture, it simply means they have accumulated virtuous roots in lives past. Therefore, they are different from regular people. Their action, resolve and faith constitute ample causes ; their cooperative relatives and wise friends represent strongly favorable conditions, and the Buddha's compassionate response indicates the mutual presence of both causes and conditions.

Question: We all wish to assist our parents and relatives bring forth faith in Amitabha when their final hours arrive, so that they may be freed from the Samsara and accomplish Bodhi while dwelling in the pure and augustly adorned Buddha-land. However, our abilities are limited. We may not find wise friends to offer counsel, and we cannot easily understand the profound principles of the Dharma. Thus, where can we find practical advice on this matter?

Answer:

Anyone who sincerely, and out of a sense of filial piety, wishes to assist their parents and relatives transcend the Samsara will certainly succeed in doing so if they carefully heed the wisdom, rites and instructions found within this handbook.

IMPORTANT PRECAUTIONS FAMILY MEMBERS MUST UNDERTAKE

- 1) Our parents are our greatest benefactors in life. Thus, we must be filial. Brothers, sisters, husbands and wives must all cherish each other. Sons, daughters and daughters in law must have kindness in their hearts. However, what exactly constitutes filial piety and kindness? If we only gloss over this matter, the risk of rebellious and derelict behavior greatly increases. Therefore, heed the following teachings very carefully.
- 2) When common people are about to die, they are on the last leg of their journey through this world. Hence, those who are relatives must show compassion and filial piety at this important time. They must comfort the heart of the dying, render excellent care and fulfill all last wishes.
- 3) When the moment of death is fast approaching, volunteer supportive chanting groups and or Dharma friends must be quickly mustered and invited. If the supportive chanters are invited into the home, all family members and relatives must cooperate and follow their instructions. As these guests wish only to save the consciousness of the dying, they must be shown appropriate hospitality and respect. If circumstances should prevent such help from arriving, then family members and relatives must step in and render the appropriate supportive chanting and Dharma-rites to the dying.

Moreover, all family members must refrain from eating meat and taking life. When the moment of death arrives, supportive chanting must be diligently and sincerely performed. The objective should be to ensure swift rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Thus, there should be no desperate unilateral attempts to apply unwarranted treatment, against the wishes of the dying, in order to squeeze out a few more hours of life.

- 4) The eve of death represents the crossroads between the Sagely path of the Western Pure Land, the blissful realms of the gods, asuras and humans, and the suffering of the realms of the ghosts, animals and hell beings.

Therefore, when relatives support the dying's bid to be reborn in the Pure Land through supportive chanting of Amitabha's name, they are sending their consciousness to the wondrous bliss of Pure Land.

However, if they instead confuse the dying with tears of sorrow and emotional displays, they are condemning their consciousness to the volatile suffering of the evil realms. How could anyone do something so cruel and unfilial?

- 5) Furthermore, the sutras clearly state that the suffering of the Hells, ghost realms and animal realms cannot be imagined. For instance, those in the Hells die thousands of times a day—reborn after each time to suffer a torturous death again and again. The denizens of the ghostly realms must suffer billions of kalpas of scorching deprivation. So acute is their hardship that they do not even know what water is, never mind food. Those who are reborn as animals must suffer at the hands of butchers for thousands of great eons. Thus, if we allow our beloved parents or relatives to fall into such states of woe, when can they ever escape ?

On the other hand, those reborn in the Pure Land enjoy the daily honor of hearing Amita Buddha personally preach the Dharma. They are peers of Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. Moreover, Their eyes meet only augustness ; wonderful sounds resound in their ears. They enjoy unlimited bliss. Complete with divine powers, they can manifest in any form to expound the Dharma wherever and whenever it is desired. Everything they do is in accordance with their will and they attain Bodhi swiftly. Thus, who can have the heart to deny their parents or relatives Pure Land rebirth? Who can live with themselves if their impulsive emotions cause the deceased to become confused, attached and disturbed, thereby sending them to the states

of woe. The fate of our relatives and parents after they pass depends upon our actions during their moment of death. The duty is ours.

- 6) If the dying has already resolved upon Pure Land rebirth beforehand, then that is the best scenario. However, if not, relatives and family must remind them of the impermanence of human life, and of the following:
 - a) The endless suffering of the Samsara and of death and rebirth.
 - b) The Hells and evil realms are full of suffering and easy to tumble into.
 - c) The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is overflowing with joy and has neither death nor the three evil paths.
 - d) Those who are reborn in Pure Land come into existence through transformation while dwelling in wondrous lotus buds that are soft, clean, fragrant, august, spacious and bright.
 - e) Fine robes and delicious food appear on demand to those who dwell in Pure Land.
 - f) The bliss of Pure Land is unlimited.
 - g) Anyone who resolves to achieve such a rebirth and recites the name with faith and sincerity will meet Amitabha during their last breath. He will hold a spacious lotus in his hands and personally welcome them into the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Relatives and family must reiterate the above points at least three times a day. But, they ought to be gentle in their speech and display comforting manners. An ill and dying person's heart is extremely sensitive to stress. Thus, be mindful. Once the dying has been converted, it is no longer necessary to repeat counsel.

Thenceforth, focus on supporting their mindfulness of Amitabha.

- 7) Relatives and family members must find out if the dying has any unresolved matters or requests that they have not been able to address. Family and relatives must seek, on their own accord, such information before coherent communication becomes impossible.

If the dying has already descended into unconsciousness or lost the ability to speak, then refrain from mentioning any temporal or family matter. This is to prevent burdening them with anxieties and interfering with their mindfulness of Amitabha. Also, matters that have been settled should not be brought up again.

If the dying still retain their senses, remind them that all household and family matters will be shouldered and that they need not worry. Do so once only, and thenceforth focus on encouraging them to be single-minded in reciting and seeking rebirth in Pure Land. Moreover, point your finger towards the west and declare: “The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is right in front of you, be single-minded in Amitabha and seek rebirth there.” Exhort in such a manner a couple times a day.

However, If the dying has lost consciousness, do not say anything. Simply recite Amitabha loudly and continuously in support.

- 8) When friends and guests of the dying arrive to visit, they must first be invited into a separate room. While entertaining them, kindly remind or instruct them on the importance of the eve of death and that calmness and proper decorum must be shown. Moreover, exhort them on the importance of helping the dying be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Such precautions are to prevent ignorance and disruptive emotional outbursts, and also to recruit supportive chanters.

- 9) If the terminally ill and dying should become uncooperative and hostile towards mindfulness of Amitabha, annoyed when others recite the Buddha's name, or if they shall see the ghosts of karmic creditors arriving to exact revenge, then these are signs of manifesting negative and obstructive karma.

In such situations, family and relatives must recite and repent on the dying's behalf in front of the Buddha in order to neutralize the negative karma obstructing Pure Land rebirth.

For instance, last year, an upasaka's mother became depressed upon hearing Amita Buddha's name and requested the supportive chanters that had assembled beside her to cease chanting. The Dharma Master present immediately recognized that this was due to her negative karma and quickly recited the Earth Store Sutra a couple times on her behalf to eradicate the obstacle. The upasaka also sincerely repented in front of a Buddha image on his mother's behalf. Subsequently, she became joyfully receptive towards their chanting and was reborn in Pure Land soon after. Thus, the Earth Store Sutra is a potent remedy for dealing with evil karma. If it is too difficult to recite the whole sutra, simply reciting the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva would suffice.

In another case, an upasaka's terminally ill father saw a female ghost and her dog approach him in a hostile manner. Once the upasaka recited and repented on his father's behalf, the two ghosts disappeared. Afterwards, the ghosts of two monks came to obstruct his Pure Land rebirth. They said that he had prevented their Pure Land rebirth in a former life and they were now going to return the favor. The upasaka then recited and repented on his father's behalf once more, and prayed to the two ghosts that once his father had achieved Pure Land rebirth, he would use his Bodhisattva powers to help them do the same. The karmic creditors agreed and left. The father then saw an old monk say: "Your sins have been eradicated, in three sevens, you will be reborn in Pure Land, and your place is fifth."

Those present initially thought the old monk meant 21 days and were doubtful that they could continue to chant for that long. However, the father attained Pure Land rebirth after 21 hours. Most likely, “fifth place” referred to aspirants of the middle of the second grade (there are three grades with three levels each).

Thus, it is very clear that the performance of rites (such as the sutra recitations and penances) and supportive chanting by family, relatives and friends are of great benefit to the ill and dying.

- 10) If when the dying are about to stop breathing, there are many supportive chanters, they should all kneel and chant in front of a Buddha image. However, if there are few chanters, then they should be positioned next to the dying. However, they should not be in a position where they are face to face. This is to prevent provoking expressions of grief and sadness. Thus, the chanters should flank the dying or station themselves behind them. Moreover, the voice of the chanters should be calm, clear, loud, consistent and free from even a hint of grief and melancholy. Supportive chanters must be well composed and focus only on properly reciting Amitabha with the sincere wish of obtaining the Buddha’s compassionate protection for the dying, and for their swift rebirth in the Pure Land.
- 11) It is absolutely **imperative** that the body of the deceased not be touched, disturbed or moved in any way. Moreover, if bugs or foreign objects should find its way onto the body, it should be carefully removed at once. The reason for such precautions is that the soul usually does not leave the body immediately after breathing stops. Thus, weeping and outbursts of emotion should also be refrained from. Any disturbance can cause thoughts of anger and attachment within the consciousness of the deceased, thereby causing them to be led by their emotions into rebirth in the evil paths (e.g. ghost

or animal). As long as there is some warmth left in the body, the soul has not yet completely left. However, nobody may touch the body in search of warmth out of curiosity. Doing so is absolutely forbidden. But, **if more than ten hours** have passed, then a wise and senior supportive chanter or Dharma friend can skillfully check for warmth. If there are no supportive chanters, then family members present can do so but only in accordance with care and proper instructions.

Furthermore, common superstitions such as sayings which demand the body be dressed and moved immediately for whatever reason are wrong. Moreover, any custom that demands open expressions of grief, such as the old superstition that those who wish to cry must cry in order to get rid of bad luck, are to be completely disregarded for they are false and harmful. The people who were sent to the evil realms by such superstitions are countless!

In the past, there was the case of King Agidatta. He was a pious sovereign who regularly made offerings to the Buddha-dharma, built temples and raised stupas. Thus, his stock of merit was very impressive. However, after he drew his last breath, one of his exhausted attendants fell asleep and dropped a fan onto his face. This provoked his anger and he was reborn as a great python. Nevertheless, because of his merit, he was able to meet a monk who spoke the Dharma to him, and after three days, he was able to ascend into the Heavens.

Furthermore, in another case, there was once a loving couple who regularly cultivated the eight precepts. However, when the husband passed, the wife openly wept. This caused strong thoughts of sentimentality to arise in him. Thus, he was immediately reborn as a bug in her wife's nostrils. When he fell out of her nose, she almost trampled him but was stopped by a nearby monk. The monk explained the situation and said that while her husband is entitled to rebirth as a god, his attachment for her (due to her weeping) caused him to stay with her in the

only capacity readily available (which was as a bug). The wife quickly repented and asked the monk to rectify the situation by speaking the Dharma. As a result, the husband left the body of the bug and ascended into the Heavens.

These two cases have been carefully documented in the sutras and are therefore authoritative references that all must heed.

Thus, we must not disturb the body while it still has warmth. Moreover, all displays of grief and sadness must be resisted. If there are experienced supportive chanters present, follow their advice. If not, then after the aforementioned period of time has passed, family members present may carefully, gently, slowly and cautiously check for warmth. Only prepare the body after it has gone completely cold (see relevant instructions in the When to Wash and Dress the Body After Death section).

SUPPORTIVE CHANTING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: What does supportive chanting mean?

Answer:

Supportive chanting refers to the efforts of others (such as the chanting of Amitabha) that buttress the continuous right mindfulness of the dying.

Question: What is right mindfulness?

Answer:

Right mindfulness refers to pure thought. Such pure thoughts take place when the mind is sincerely mindful of the Buddha's name. Mindfulness of the Buddha is the proper cause of Bodhi, and as the heart that is mindful of the Buddha does not respond to the six kinds of dust, it is considered pure and serves as a cause for Pure Land rebirth.

Question: Why do the dying need supportive chanting?

Answer:

When common people are about to die, they experience the disintegration of the four elements that constitute the body. Thus, the eve of death represents the convergence of numerous pains. Such overwhelming distress causes them to fret, suffer and fear like shellfish being boiled.

Therefore, anyone who has not achieved a dependable level of mastery during their regular cultivation and reciting will need supportive chanters during their eve of death. Even if a cultivator's regular mindfulness reaches 60% or 70% proficiency, the difficulties encountered during dying may reduce those levels to less than 30%. Thus, those whose regular cultivation are weak or non existent won't stand a chance during their eve of death unless they are bolstered by supportive chanting. All must understand that autonomy and self determination forgets the dying.

Question: Why does supportive chanting need to continue even after breathing has stopped?

Answer:

Even when breathing has stopped, the soul still lingers. Thus, the next realm of rebirth has not yet been determined, and supportive chanting at such a crossroad can make or break the deceased. As all beings have committed innumerable good and evil deeds over the course of countless rebirths, good and evil thoughts race across their minds like a lengthly unbroken chain. Of these thoughts, most are evil and few are good. **If the final thought is bad, then the Hells, ghost and animal realms will appear ; if the final thought is good, then the realm of the gods will appear. However, if the final thought is that of Amitabha with the resolve to seek rebirth in the Pure Land, then the Buddha and a retinue of Sages will appear in response.** Thus, supportive chanting is meant to suppress good and evil thoughts so as to maintain the right mindfulness of the dying at the critical juncture of death. This is the wondrous benefit of supportive chanting.

IMPORTANT POINTS SUPPORTIVE CHANTERS MUST KNOW

- 1) Those who assume the duty of supportive chanting are carrying out the Buddha's mission of liberating beings from the Samsara. Thus, they must never perform such a great undertaking as if it were merely perfunctory. Sincerity, care and caution must be ever present as any misstep or failure to go the extra mile can ruin the future of the deceased for eons.
- 2) Volunteer supportive chanters who visit the home of the dying must first assemble all of the relatives and family members. They are to be instructed on the important role the eve of death plays in determining the future rebirth of the dying, and reminded of their filial duty to cooperate and help the dying attain Pure Land rebirth.
- 3) When supportive chanters enter the sickroom, they must be polite and sincere, and their speech must be gentle and comforting. Good first impressions will establish trust. They must first praise the good deeds of the sick and dying in order to help them bring forth a positive state of mind. Afterwards, they are to skillfully help the sick to resolve upon rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Moreover, volunteer chanters must see the sick and dying as their own parents. Perhaps, in a prior life, they were. Thus, when volunteer chanters see the sick in such a light, the care and support they render would naturally be peerless.
- 4) The sickroom must be converted into a sterile environment where gossip and casual conversations are forbidden. Moreover, the sick must not be troubled by conversations regarding temporal matters. This is to prevent disrupting their right mindfulness. If guests should approach the sick room, supportive chanters must inquire if they intend to render supportive chanting. If not, they are to be invited to another room to be entertained. If so, they must be instructed properly. This is to prevent disruptive grief and sadness. Supportive chanters must know that it is their duty to create a pure environment conducive towards attaining Pure Land rebirth. Thus, they must not

shy away from their duty because of fear of causing offense. The will of the Buddha and Dharma must take precedence over worldly emotions.

- 5) The variation of the name of Amita Buddha that is chanted, the pace and volume must be in accordance with the preferences of the dying.

If unconsciousness makes it impossible to know what is preferred, then the chanting must be neither loud nor quiet ; neither fast nor slow. This is because a fast pace is hard to comprehend, a slow pace strains those chanting and causes drowsiness, a loud voice is hard to maintain and a quiet voice is hard to hear. Thus, the sound and pace must be just right to ensure that the name of Amitabha enters clearly and consistently into the ears of the dying.

Supportive chanters must never vary their chanting in accordance with their own caprice. They must know that the sick and dying are often too weak to recite themselves. Thus, they depend upon the consistent and proper chanting of others to maintain their own right mindfulness.

- 6) If after supportive chanting has been performed for a while, the dying suddenly become conscious and active, then those chanting must not be startled or curious. Just as the waning flame burns brightest before going out, the dying may become suddenly lucid before breathing stops (usually 2 hours later).

There have been many cases of chanters (who have chanted for many days) being confronted by a suddenly lucid patient. Thinking that the patient had recovered, they stopped chanting, only to have the patient die less than 2 hours later.

- 7) If the dying pass away at the same time the supporting chanters first arrive, or if breathing stopped one, two or three hours earlier, then those arriving must know that they have entered at the most critical phase of the juncture. They should first loudly counsel the consciousness of the dying once, and then start chanting.

As the breathing has stopped, the consciousness of the deceased, regardless of whether the relatives or family members present have openly wept or not, will most likely be distressed. Thus, by first loudly offering counsel, the soul of the deceased gains the opportunity to regroup, take refuge, joyfully accept Amitabha and resolve for rebirth in the Pure Land.

The statement must be brief and concise, such as: “(Name)! Do not be attached to your past good and evil. Let go of your family, property and all temporal matters. With one heart and one mind, recite the name of Amita Buddha and seek rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. We will help you do so with our supportive chanting. Let your heart be exclusively mindful of our chanting and with your every thought abide in Amita Buddha—resolve upon rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss!” (Recite underlined parts once more)

Begin chanting immediately after delivering counsel. Do so in a loud voice and recite the simplest version of Amita Buddha (which is any version without the honorific “Namo”).

If the deceased has already resolved upon Pure Land rebirth whilst living, then rebirth there is most likely assured. If not, then they benefit no matter where they go. For instance, according to the Earth Store Sutra: “Those who perceive a Buddha’s name upon their passing shall have even the five grave offenses eradicated.”

Thus, allowing the dead and dying to hear the name of Amitabha is an act of immense and unimaginable benefit.

THE MERIT ACCUMULATED BY SUPPORTIVE CHANTERS

For every act, there is an echo. If we are willing to support others in their hour of greatest need, then when our time comes, wise friends and the like will naturally appear (due to our good karma) to render upon us the same kindness.

Those whom we have helped send to Pure Land would certainly be among the Bodhisattvas that accompany Amitabha when he appears before us. They will bestow blessings and protection that will bolster our right mindfulness.

Moreover, as we regularly assist others in managing the moment of death, we will naturally become experts of that critical moment, and make the necessary preparations (based on accumulated experiences) when our own end approaches.

We must understand that the purpose of a Buddha's appearance in this world is to help all beings become Buddhas by transcending the Samsara. This was why Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Dharma for 49 years, and it is also the reason behind Amita Buddha's 48 Great Vows and his wondrously adorned Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

As all other Dharma-doors require the cultivator to completely deracinate the root causes of their delusions, few can successfully follow such teachings as they rely solely on the self power of the individual. However, the Pure Land Dharma-door is based upon the power of Amita Buddha's compassionate Great Vows and blessings. It is the only way for those unable to practice difficult high-level Samadhi to become a Buddha within one life by accepting the open invitation to the Western Pure Land. It is a Dharma-door all people can cultivate. If we help shoulder the Buddha's burden of liberating beings by aiding the dead and dying become Buddhas, we are creating the causes of Bodhi for ourself. When the time comes, these merits will assist our own liberation from the wearisome cycle of death and rebirth. It is simply a matter of cause and effect.

REGARDING THE CLEANLINESS OF THE SICKROOM OR WARD

The room where the sick and dying occupy must be kept clean and free of clutter. This is to avert restricting the ease of movement of supportive chanters and to prevent the sick and dying from being troubled by uncleanliness.

If the sick and dying are conscious, family members or Dharma friends present must often remind them (while facing the west) to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Moreover, if they are able, they must be instructed to sleep on their right side (akin to the Reclining Buddha's auspicious resting position). However, if afflicted by pain, then whatever position they find most calming and comfortable should take precedence.

There must also be an altar with either images of the Three Sages of the West or a statue of Amita Buddha. Offerings such as flowers, fruits and the like must be placed before the images. This altar must also face the dying in order to inspire reverence and awe.

If the sheets or clothes become soiled, they should be changed immediately. However, if the moment of death has arrived, no change of sheets or clothes should be done. Instead, urgently recite Amita Buddha's name. Family and supportive chanters must understand that once the critical moment of death has arrived, any odor issue is of no importance compared to maintaining mindfulness of Amitabha. The body cannot be cleaned until many hours later, after all warmth has left.

Translator's Notes:

It is also important for the sickroom or ward to be properly ventilated. Moreover, the temperature must be kept at a comfortable level, and any source of noise or sound that interferes with the sound of chanting must be kept at the minimum level possible.

SHATTERING DOUBTS AND MISGIVINGS

When the dying are stricken with severe illness, family and friends must urgently inquire if they have any unaddressed wishes that disturb their peace of mind. If there are, they must be dealt with at once. If there aren't, then do not ask a second time to prevent disrupting their right mindfulness!

If the dying should fear being unable to enter the Pure Land due to heavy sins or a short history of cultivation, they should be reassured that the length of cultivation and heaviness of any past offense does not affect their right to enter Pure Land. All that matters is that they are unwavering and single-minded in their resolve/mindfulness to seek such a rebirth from when they first vowed to their last breath. They should also be reminded that it is written in the sutras that: "Even those of heavy sins may enter Pure Land if they resolve to do so only after being counseled on the eve of death." And that, "Eight billion great eons of heavy karmic offenses are eradicated when the name of Amitabha is recited once."

If the dying should express attachment to family and property, then supportive chanters must say: "This world is overflowing with suffering. Old age, sickness and death are all unbearably painful. On the other hand, the denizens of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss enjoy unlimited joy and are forever happy. They never age, never fall ill and never die. Once you are reborn in Pure Land, you can use your Bodhisattva powers to persuade all your family members to seek Pure Land rebirth, and thereafter enjoy eternal bliss together. Thus, discard your attachments to family and property as they only hinder your advancement. From now on, recite and be mindful of Amitabha with one heart. Whenever attachments arise, silence them by pondering upon the many sufferings of this impermanent world and of the everlasting bliss of the Pure Land. You now hold the rarest chance to attain everlasting bliss for both you and all your relatives, if it is lost, when comes another?"

Furthermore, if the dying should question why they have not seen the Buddha yet despite having recited, or if they should doubt whether Amita Buddha would actually show up, then they must be reminded that it

matters not whether they have seen the Buddha or not, for even if they have not yet any response, they certainly will at their moment of death. All that matters is that they never cease reciting Amita Buddha's name, for when their last moment comes, if their heart dwells in Amitabha, Amitabha will respond within that heart, and they will ascend to Pure Land within the same sincere and mindful heart. However, if they harbor doubts, they create barriers between themselves and Amitabha. Therefore, as long as they are **faithfully** mindful of Amita Buddha with one heart, their heart will mutually interact with that of the Buddha's. They will thus attain rebirth in the Pure Land.

Supportive chanters and Dharma friends must understand that some people see the Buddha earlier while others see him later. For instance, some see Amita Buddha appear anywhere from a day or two to a few hours or minutes before breathing stops. However, others only see the Buddha appear at the very last second (as their consciousness departs).

Moreover, if the dying should have nightmares, see frightful waking visions and or hear disturbing sounds while reciting, they must be reassured that such occurrences are merely the doing of their past life karmic creditors (who intend to sabotage their Pure Land rebirth). They are to pay no heed to such distractions and continue their right mindfulness. With unceasing right mindfulness, the evil sights and sounds will recede and disappear on their own.

Finally, if the sick and dying should see the spirits of deceased family members and relatives (such as grandparents etc.) coming to take them away, they must understand that such spirits are actually evil demons masquerading as someone they once held dear. Their purpose is to cause evil realm rebirth. If the dying should see radiant gods and goddesses arriving to welcome them into their ranks, they should also be unmoved. In both cases, they must pay absolutely no heed and focus only on being mindful of Amitabha. Only upon the arrival of Amitabha or Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta are they to follow. They must remember that the response of the Buddha is caused by their own pure will, and so, a heart that is sincerely mindful of the Buddha begets such an appearance!

CONVERTING THE DYING

Convert the dying with the following speech:

“You must understand that no person living in this world can avert sickness and death. Thus, whenever you are afflicted by the pain of illness, you must not be caught up in thoughts of anxiety and discontent. You shall focus on being mindful of Amitabha, and as your ears resound with his name, rest your resolve for rebirth in the Pure Land upon those sounds. Do so and your pains will lighten immensely. A person mindful of Amitabha must not dither in casting aside all their temporal attachments upon the arrival of their final hour of life. Their heart and mind ought to be ever pure and mindful only of Amita Buddha’s name—single-mindedly and unceasingly mindful. Moreover, it matters not if it takes three, five or seven days to attain Pure Land rebirth—your resolve for it and mindfulness of Amitabha must remain unwavering to the last. Do so and you will succeed.”

“Furthermore, you must not be gripped by foolish common fears when confronted by death. Do not panic and desperately pine for a reprieve from Heaven, spirits and deities. You should know that those who resolve upon Pure Land rebirth must rely only on Amitabha and have faith in his speedy appearance regardless of the pain or illness they meet. Heaven, spirits and deities are themselves subject to the pains of death and rebirth. Thus, what help in leaving the Samsara could they possibly offer you?”

“Only the benevolence of Amita Buddha, his transcendental powers and his 48 Great Vows can help you liberate yourself from death and rebirth. Thus, swiftly replace any thought of seeking help from Heaven and spirits with resolve for Pure Land and single-minded recitation of Amitabha. When your lifespan is up, you will be reborn there. If, however, you recite only to seek recovery, then you will squander your last chance, for if your lifespan is finished, Pure Land will not appear, and if it is not up yet, it would be supremely difficult to salvage your ailing body anyway.”

“You must understand that all human beings are cursed with numerous worries. However, the bliss and ease of Pure Land is unlimited. Thus, you must not fear death as such fear raises a wall between you and Amitabha’s Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, leaving you to flounder endlessly amidst the stormy seas of birth and death.”

“Therefore, you must chastise yourself whenever panicky fear of death arises in your heart. Remind yourself in no uncertain terms that your unwavering objective is to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Thus how could you let these hindrances block your path to salvation? Thenceforth, recite the Buddha’s name with utmost sincerity ; seek only Amita Buddha’s compassionate early arrival.”

“Lastly, you must know that both illnesses or the appearance of evil ghosts are simply maturing negative karma created in a prior life. Once you understand, you will be at peace and wholeheartedly seek Pure Land rebirth through the name of Amitabha!”

DEALING WITH SEVERE PAIN AND ILLNESS AT THE TIME OF DEATH

If cultivators are afflicted with major illness during their eve of death, they must neither fear nor become disheartened. As even the great Tang dynasty Dharma Master Xuanzang encountered the difficulties of illness during his eve of death, common people who are so often tangled by burdensome karma cannot easily avoid such adversity.

Therefore, they must realize that such illnesses have a clear past life karmic cause, and are often simply the vanguard of even more severe karmic retribution (such as rebirth in the Hells). However, thanks to their good roots, they create great merit through their resolve to recite the Buddha's name. This commutes the entire karmic retribution to just the illness being experienced. After the short period of pain has taken course, the eternal bliss of Pure Land arises.

Thus, they must resist being provoked by their pains. They must single-mindedly and steadfastly hold onto the Buddha's name, for it is the difference between the Land of Ultimate Bliss and the suffering of the Hells. If the illness has sapped away all available strength, then just reciting the single word "Buddha" with resolve for Pure Land will suffice. If even that cannot be done, then imagine that Amita Buddha has truly appeared and is extending a warm welcome. Concentrate the mind upon such a resolve and sight, and it will become a reality when death comes.

The Ancient Sages have said in the sutras that: "If at the eve of death neither sight nor voice can be of service, but the thought knows the Buddha, then such a person can achieve Pure Land rebirth upon death."

Therefore, if those who are crushed by illness to the point that they can neither observe an image of Amitabha nor continuously recite the name can pine for and unceasingly imagine in their hearts that Amitabha has truly arrived to welcome them into the Pure Land, then based on the sheer will of their final thought and resolve, they will succeed.



Amitabha welcoming an aspirant into the Pure Land

SUPPORTIVE CHANTING METHODS

Regarding the matter of supportive chanting, the severity of the illness that afflicts the dying person must be taken into consideration.

If the illness is not paralyzingly severe, perform the full opening rites before supportive chanting begins:

1.) Recite the **Lotus Lagoon Assembly Prayer** (蓮池讚) once :

There upon the Lotus Lagoon Assembly, Amita Tathagata sits atop the lofty Lotus Dais—flanked by Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta—inviting you to ascend the golden steps while pronouncing great vows ; resolute in leaving all defilements and dusts forever behind.

2.) Recite the **Amitabha Sutra** once.

3.) Recite the **Mantra for Pure Land Rebirth** thrice (preferably 21 times):

NA MO A MI DUO PO YE DUO TUO CHIEH DUO YE

DUO DI YE TUO A MI LI DU PO PI A MI LI DUO XI DAN PO PI

A MI LI DUO PI JIA LAN DI A MI LI DUO PI JIA LAN DUO

CHIEH MI LI CHIEH CHIEH NUO ZHI DUO JIA LI

SUO PO HE

4.) Recite the **Praise of Amitabha** once:

**Amita Buddha's aurulent form and appearance,
Is august and resplendent without peer.
His fair brows circumvent five Sumeru peaks,
And his purple eyes are as clear as the Four Great Seas.**

**Within his radiant halo are countless Buddhas,
And a host of Bodhisattvas limitless and boundless.
His 48 Great Vows will save sentient beings of any rank,
And all nine grades of aspirants shall reach the other bank.**

5.) Recite **Namo Greatly Compassionate and Benevolent Amitabha of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss** once.

6.) Recite **Namo Amita Buddha** six times.

7.) Continuously recite a shorter version of Amita Buddha's name (i.e. any version without the honorific "Namo").

If the illness is severe, recite only Amitabha's name. Moreover, the Dharma instruments used should consist only of the small hand bell as the wooden fish temple block would be too rough in sound. The supportive chanters should be divided into five teams. Two teams for the day shift and three teams for the night. Each team should have two or more persons. Change teams every hour. The first team of the day shift should recite loudly for one hour ; the second team follows with quiet recitation for another hour, and so forth. Teams should alternate between the roles of loud and quiet recitation. When the night shift arrives, the first team recites loudly and the two teams that follow will recite quietly.

Rotate teams so that those who recite quietly will recite loudly next time and vice versa. A rotation and shift schedule allows for continuous recitation and conservation of strength.

Supportive chanters must also remind the dying that if they are able, they should chant along. If not, they are to carefully hear each word and mentally follow. Tell them to wholeheartedly take refuge in the name of Amitabha that resounds in the room. Afterwards, begin chanting. If the dying are unconscious, gently ring the hand bell near their ears and recite with a more raised voice.

When it becomes clear that the last breath is about to be drawn, and if the supportive chanters are numerous, family members and those present are to recite while kneeling or prostrating before the altar or image of the Buddha and pray for Amitabha's swift arrival, and for his bright light of salvation to envelop the dying.

At this time, all supportive chanters are to be consolidated into two groups that will each loudly recite for half an hour. The recitations must continue in this manner for 3 hours after the moment of death. After that, return to the old rotation schedule, but do not recite silently.

During the moments leading up to the last breath, supportive chanters must be aware of signs of distress exhibited by the dying, such as: Sweating, anxious facial expressions, quivering, trembling and or unconsciousness. Such displays indicate that right mindfulness is unlikely to be present in the dying's mind.

Therefore, if such signs are present, supportive chanters are to loudly warn the dying with the following statement: "(Name)...The Western Pure Land is right in front of you! Reinforce your mindfulness of Amitabha! You must attain Pure Land rebirth!" Warn twice. If there is not even a slight positive change, warn once more. However, do not warn more than a total of three times. Afterwards, recite Amitabha loudly.

Furthermore, after breathing stops but before the body has gone gold, the supportive chanters present must guard against any attempt to disturb the body and prevent any and all expressions of sorrow or grief. The only thing that should be done is to continue chanting Amitabha out loud.

Only when a day and night have passed can an experienced Dharma friend or supportive chanter cautiously check for warmth. If the body has gone completely cold, supportive chanting may cease. Final dedications of the merit from the supportive chanting towards the deceased's Pure land rebirth may then take place.

If the body has not gone completely cold, those present must persevere in their supportive chanting even if it takes another one, two or three days. They must not let slothfulness rob the deceased of salvation and stand in the way of the Buddha's will.

WHEN TO DRESS AND WASH THE BODY AFTER DEATH

When the body has gone completely cold, wait until another two hours have passed before preparing the body for burial. If the joints have become hard, wrap them in cloth soaked in warm water. After a few minutes, they will become soft. Likewise, If the eyes have not closed, drape warm soaked cloth upon them. After a few minutes, they can be closed. As for the clothes, choose the ones they usually wear. It is not necessary to splurge on expensive garments or lavish funeral displays.

The most important thing is to help deceased relatives attain Pure Land rebirth. Ostentatious and boastful funerals are unnecessary and selfish as they do not help the deceased in any way. A modest and dignified burial will suffice in fulfilling filial duty.

THE BEST WAY TO TRANSFER BLESSINGS TO THE DEPARTED

Within the 49 day period after death, the entire household of the deceased must create merits on behalf of the dead. They should therefore recite Amitabha's name, abstain from all meat or alcohol, and hold the five precepts. They shall not steal, not kill, not lie, and imbibe neither intoxicants nor flavor with the five pungent plants (onions, garlic, shallots, leeks and chives) as they are mentioned in the Shurangama Sutra to be a cause of anger and lust.

Monks and nuns can be invited to recite the Buddha's name for the benefit of the deceased. How long and how many depends upon available funds and resources. As family members have strong relationships, their recitations are often more sincere. Either way, as long as it is sincere, there is great merit. Those reciting should dedicate these merits to the deceased's Pure Land rebirth in front of the memorial everyday. If the deceased has already attained Pure Land rebirth, these merits will help them attain Bodhi in Pure Land more quickly. If they have not, these merits will help their souls seek such a rebirth.

As mentioned before, The Contemplation Sutra makes clear that each utterance of Amitabha can eradicate 8 billion great eons of severe karmic retribution. Thus, no other ceremony, sutra, penance or prayer can match the merit created by sincerely reciting Amita Buddha's name.

Even though the other merit making practices and rites are indeed powerful if faithfully done, few nowadays have the patience and spiritual mastery necessary. Even Patriarch Yin Guang warned: "The ordained of today are often perfunctory and do not act in accordance with the Dharma. They focus only on external appearances and superficial etiquette. However, chanting the name of Amitabha is something everyone can do. The resulting merit is boundless, potent and impressive. Thus, if the merits are dedicated to the Pure Land rebirth of all the beings within the Dharma-realm, the deceased will benefit boundlessly."

INQUIRIES REGARDING THE INTERMEDIATE STATE BETWEEN DEATH AND REBIRTH

Question: Why do the relatives of the deceased need to abstain from meat and recite the Buddha's name for 49 days after the deceased has passed?

Answer:

If the deceased has attained rebirth in Pure Land, the merits created on their behalf will help them achieve Bodhi even more quickly than otherwise possible. If the deceased has not yet been reborn, these merits will help them give rise to the causes (i.e. faith, resolve and action) of Pure Land rebirth. This rescues them from the uncertainty of the intermediate state and propels them into the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Moreover, the family members create for themselves great merit as well.

Question: What is the intermediate state?

Answer:

The intermediate state refers to the state between death and the confirmation of a new rebirth. It is like the hallway between rooms. Only those who have attained Pure Land rebirth upon death, or those who have either great merit or immense evil do not go through the intermediate state. Those of great merit ascend to the Heavens immediately ; those of immense evil tumble into the Hells straight away. However, those of neither great good nor heavy evil wait for a period of up to (generally) 49 days before the next rebirth within the Samsara is decided by the final balance of karma. Good deeds and virtue done by family members at this time can tip the scales in favor of the deceased. Evil deeds do the opposite and actually heap additional offenses upon them—if they were good, they will have their past good deeds soiled ; if they were evil, they would be cast into the deepest Hells by the cumulative karmic burden. Thus, family members must be dutifully virtuous and vigilant during this time.

Question: If financially challenged families must spend 49 days creating merit, how are they supposed to live?

Answer:

Buddha name recitation creates the greatest merit. Thus, those of limited resources should refrain from inviting monks and nuns and instead recite themselves. Their own meatless diets and recitations will more than suffice.

They may, based upon their own schedules, set aside three times a day where they will recite the Buddha's name. After they are finished, they shall dedicate the merit in front of the memorial to the deceased. Preferably, they should recite in the morning (before breakfast) and then either before or after both lunch and dinner. When they are working or attending to other routines, they may (unless what they are doing requires their full attention) recite silently and dedicate the merit to the deceased.

Thus, there is no conflict between regular life and helping the deceased. Moreover, the merit created will benefit both the living relatives and the deceased. It is a mutually beneficial endeavor.

CONCURRING WITH CHAPTER SEVEN OF THE EARTH STORE SUTRA: BENEFITING THE DEAD AND LIVING

In the Earth Store Sutra, an elder known as Great Eloquence joined his palms and respectfully asked Earth Store Bodhisattva: “Your Eminence, if the close kin or distant relatives of a recently deceased inhabitant of Jambudvīpa were to create merit on their behalf by holding the precepts, abstaining from meat and doing various good deeds, can the deceased obtain the greatest benefit and be thus liberated?”

Earth Store replied, “Noble Elder! When beings of both present and future die, and if they could hear the name of but one Buddha, Bodhisattva or Paṣcekabuddha at that time, then regardless of whether they are guilty of offenses or not, they will all find liberation (in the Western Pure Land).”

The Bodhisattva also said, “The Phantom of Impermanence appears so suddenly that the consciousness of the departed are cast into glooming uncertainty—unaware of their balance of karma. And so, for seven seasons of seven days each, they are as if senseless, or as anxious as an accused waiting in court for judgement to be rendered. Once their karmic path has been confirmed, they are reborn accordingly. Until then, they are stricken with thousands of fears, not to mention those who are destined for the evil realms.”

“Throughout the seven seven day cycles, those who are dead but not yet reborn ache desperately with every thought for their own flesh and blood to create the blessings to save them. Once this period of time has passed, their fate is confirmed. Those who have often transgressed will undergo punishment for thousands of centuries without chance of pardon. Those who have committed the five grave offenses will be condemned to suffer relentlessly in the deepest circles of Hell for thousands upon thousands of kalpas.”

“..... Therefore, if the kin of the the departed can eagerly raise good deed after good deed within the seven cycles of seven days each, then those who have passed may forever shun the evil realms and ascend into the ranks of men and gods to enjoy supremely wondrous bliss. The surviving kin

would likewise receive limitless benefits.”

REGARDING STROKE AND DEAFNESS

Question: If those who have regularly nurtured their faith and resolve for Pure Land rebirth should be rendered unconscious, senseless and mute by stroke, then how effective is supportive chanting in this case? Moreover, if it is only marginally helpful, then where are the merits they have accumulated?

Answer:

The merit from reciting the Buddha's name is inconceivable. If there is a person of the described situation, then the benefits of supportive chanting by Dharma friends will still be unimaginably helpful. If their merit allows them to regain consciousness and their senses before passing, then they will attain Pure Land rebirth while blessed by the Buddha's powers upon death. If they die senseless and unconscious, then on account of the merit they have accumulated and the resolve they have nurtured, the supportive chanting rendered by kind friends will allow their consciousness to regroup and attain Pure Land rebirth during the intermediate state.

Even if they are unable to do so despite these supportive conditions, **their work is certainly not in vain!** The accumulated good roots will sprout into Pure Land rebirth in a future life. For instance, according to the sutras, an old person once shouted for the Buddha when confronted by a tiger. This one act caused him to eventually meet the Buddha. Thus, how much more secure are those who have cultivated throughout their life?

Question: Can deaf people benefit from supportive chanting?

Answer:

Deafness is caused by past offenses relating to the ear organ. Nevertheless, even the deaf can be reborn in Pure Land due to supportive chanting. How so? Even though they are deaf, their innate perception is still present. Therefore,

As long as they are of sound mind, their resolve and mindfulness for Pure Land rebirth can generate a response from the Buddha. Moreover, the united intent of their supportive chanters and the merit of Amitabha's name are both inconceivably powerful. Thus, their rebirth in Pure Land becomes as smooth as a sailboat sailing amid favorable winds!

Moreover, as the limitations of the body dissolve at death, their Eighth Consciousness reemerges and is complete in its cognition and perception.

WHERE DOES THE SOUL DEPART TO AFTER LEAVING THE BODY?

Boundless space and endless time constitute the Universe. Within this vast body, the experiences of various consciousnesses are also diverse without limit. For simplicity's sake, they can be divided into ten levels. Of those ten, four belong to the Sagely and six belong to common souls subject to death and rebirth. Even though the innate nature of all ten levels are the same, the inhabitants differ in the purity of their habits. These differences underpin the divergence between the path of the Sagely and common. Within the path of common beings, differing good and evil karma create the Six Realms of Death and Rebirth. Thus, the saying that the Dharma-realm is dictated by the heart refers to the fact that the difference between advancement to Sagehood or karmic downfall depends only upon the will behind one's actions. It takes just one truly proper thought for Sagely realms to arise.

However, as the Dharma-ending age has already begun, the will to act is insufficient by itself. Cultivation by self power alone would be so difficult that even if hundreds of millions of people were to cultivate, there may not be even one Sage among them in the end. The people of today are dull, misguided, defiled and deluded. They are also false, tumultuous, of heavy sins and scant fortune, are unwise and saddled by obstacles.

Thus, out of compassion for such hopeless beings of the Dharma-ending age, Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the Dharma-door of Mindfulness of the Buddha's Name : That there is a Buddha in the West known as Amita who uses the awesome power of his Great Vows to make up for the shortfall of such sentient beings. Thus, both the wise and dull, the good and evil, and all other kinds of people, as long as they are willing to repent and recite Namo Amitabha with true faith and unwavering resolve, be single minded in seeking the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, Amitabha will appear at their moment of death (along with a host of Sages) to welcome them. They attain Pure Land in that final one thought. Thenceforth, they will assume

ethereal forms whilst they dwell in the Lotus Lagoon and attain infinite life ; forever free from the Samsara, they enjoy august, eternal and wondrous bliss.

Therefore, this Dharma-door is considered the method of salvation for the period immediately before and shortly after the moment of death.

Knowing this, family, friends and relatives of a dying person must neither weep nor disturb the body. They must, within a silent and undisturbed sickroom or ward, recite out loud the name of Amitabha with a sincere, pure and calm heart. With their supportive chanting, they guide the consciousness of the dying to rejoice in the Buddha's name, and to find peace within right mindfulness. With one heart, the dying seeks the Buddha's Kingdom, and so, they shall be reborn the the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

DO NOT CREMATE UNTIL AT LEAST SEVEN DAYS HAVE PASSED

If cremation is intended, there is the matter of cold weather and warm weather. During cold weather, cremation should be delayed for at least seven days (preferably a fortnight). This is to prevent pain and distress if the consciousness still lingers. More importantly, it is a precaution in case the deceased make come back to life.

As the consciousness experiencing the intermediate state does not belong anywhere and is mired in uncertainty, it is possible for those who have not been reborn due to strong attachment towards the body to return to life to settle more karma if their body has not decayed beyond use. There is also the situation of those who die suddenly but are later found by the Spirit Officials of the Netherworld to have not yet reached their full lifespan and are sent back as a result in less than seven days, and if their body is still fresh enough, they can also return to life. Lastly, there are those who are mistakenly declared dead despite being alive and are sent to the morgue only to regain their abilities suddenly. There are numerous records of such cases and countless hospitals, temples and morgues have also experienced such situations. For instance, there is a case where a monk regained life after being sent back from the Netherworld just as he was being placed upon the pyre. He lived for another ten years!

If the weather is hot, then on account of the hastened decay, the wait time before the cremation ceremony can be reduced on discretion. However, cremating the corpse after only two or three days have passed is the most dangerous and risky.

Translator's Notes:

This section includes pertinent information from other chapters that are otherwise mostly overlap.

MAKING YOUR WISHES CLEAR TO YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS

Those who are elders must not shy away from discussing the wisdom found within this handbook because of fear that such topic may bring inauspiciousness.*

The moment of death and its significant implications apply to everyone. All male and female adults of the household must understand that time flies. Moreover, elderly people must discuss the teachings of this book and their final wishes with their children and family members while they are still of sound mind and able to communicate freely.

As most people who are not yet middle aged do not even think about death, elders must instruct those who will handle their moment of death so they can be properly prepared. This is to prevent uneducated sons and daughters from botching up their eve of death and causing their consciousness pain.

Translator's Notes:

*In fact, in the the Woe and Weal Sutra of the Faithful Sutra (阿難問事佛吉凶經), it is mentioned that true disciples of the Buddha are forbidden from picking out auspicious hours and days. Thus, superstitious fears (such as if discussing proper arrangements would hasten death) are invalid and rooted in ignorance .

MODERN PURE LAND REBIRTH CASES

Pure Land is my Home The Story of my Father's Rebirth

by Guo Xuan Lee

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Pure Sound From Silicon Valley

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My parents lived in Australia and they did not believe in Buddhadharma. When I first started to study Buddhadharma, I also exhorted my family to study, my mother and younger sister followed with me, and they became vegetarians and started to recite the Buddha's name, however, my father still insisted that we were being superstitious, and he even obstructed my cultivation.

One day, my parents and younger sister had a car accident when they were driving. The accident was quite serious, the whole car was almost wrecked, and my father went into coma and bled a lot, however, my mother and younger sister remained safe and sound. After this experience, mother and sister gained more faith in the Buddhadharma, while my father was sick in bed and could not walk, but he had a strong belief that his body would recover as wholesome as before, and he could walk freely, therefore, he asked many good doctors to treat him, but all efforts went in vain, his physical health did not get any better. Because of this, he lose his temper all the times, which made my mother afflicted a lot, therefore I went back to Australia to visit them.

After I got home, I explained to my father the truth of “birth, old age, sickness, death, and other Buddhadharma. I told him,” you have already gone through the suffering of birth and old age, now you are undergoing the suffering of sickness, and the last one could be the suffering of death.” I explained Buddhadharma to him everyday, so he started to gain a bit of faith, he told me that one day when he was lying in bed, he saw his room caught on a heavy fire, but strange indeed was that there were some fish amid the fire, he hurried to call my mother in, however when my mother came, she saw nothing.

My father asked me what did that mean, I told him my personal view ” Our physical body is like the house we are living in, now the house is on fire, it means that our body is being broken down; as for the fish, when did you see a fish with closed eyes? Fish always keep their eyes open, which means that you should wake up soon, don’t get attached and confused any more. You really had a lot of blessings, since Buddhas and Bodhisattvas showed you these in order to make you wake up soon! Your body condition is getting down soon, do not get attached to it any longer.” From this on, my father changed to a vegetarian diet and started to recite the Buddha’s name.

Half a year before my father’s rebirth, my elder sister visited him once. She a filial daughter with a kind heart, but being a Catholic, she believes animals are created to be eaten by human, as long as human are kind. So when she found that our father was sick, weak, and on a veggie diet, she was worried that our father did not get enough nutrition. Therefore, she explained her concern to father, and asked him whether she could cook meat for him. He took her advice at once, and was happy that he could eat meat again. So one thing led to another, and he could not stop, later on he even desired to eat pig’s feet every day. My mother called

me and asked me to talk to my father, over the phone, I just said a few words to him, “Dad, if you eat other beings’ feet now, in the future, other beings will eat your feet.” One week later, my mom called me again and told me that my father had returned to a vegetarian diet.

Two months before my father’s rebirth, he could fall asleep every night. It seemed that he kept talking to someone, getting angry and yelling. Therefore, I went back again to Australia to visit him. I asked him why he could not sleep. He said that some beings came to bother him every night, and none of them had feet. I realized at once that they were his enemies and debtors. I told him, “It is because you ate others’ feet in the past, now they all came back to you. “Then I asked him,” How did you treat them?” He said,” I am not afraid of them, I never did a single evil thing or harm a single person in my life, therefore I do not need be afraid of them, if they come, I will fight with them!” I advised him not behave like that, because those ghost beings are in great suffering, without blessings, they have no opportunities of encountering Buddhadharma, that is why we should be compassionate with them.

I said, “If they come again tonight, you apologize to them, and tell them because you did not understand principles, you harmed them, now you are seeking forgiveness from them. Also you can tell them to recite the Buddha’s name, so that they can seek rebirth, and end birth and death. You yourself also have to recite the Buddha’s name on behalf of them, recite Amitabha Buddha.” The next morning, I asked father whether they came or not and how was it. He said they did come, and he addressed them as I taught, then he recited the Buddha’s name on their behalf, and they did not disturb him any long, they stood there listening to the Buddha’s name, after that, they left.

A week before my father's rebirth, one day, it looked like he was dying, therefore, my mother and younger sister started to recite the Buddha's name, after a whole day, my father is still alive. Suddenly, my younger sister smelt fragrant incense, which lasts for about 5 minutes. At that time, she understood that she need offer incense. Therefore, she asked mother to bring an incensory for her to lit incense, wishing the Buddha could come to welcome father and his enemies and debtees into pure land. After making the incense offering, they continued reciting the Buddha's name. At that time, my younger sister heard other voices around them, a lot of melodic voices resound in the air, reciting the Buddha's name. My younger sister said that upon hearing these wonderful sounds, she felt very pure and clear in heart. One week later, my father passed away, his mind was quite clear when he was dying, but he already put down everything, his wife, children, and houses, his only wish was to follow the Buddha and he was ready. He passed away very peacefully. His face looked ruddy and pleasant, and even had a smile on it. His body was also very soft. Some people who came to assist reciting the Buddha's name even smelt fragrant incense.

Forty-nine days after my father's rebirth, one day when my son Mingguang was in sleep, he felt someone nudging his elbows in his dream, when he opened eyes, he saw his grandfather. Mingguang said that his grandfather did not look like before, since his grandfather had the appearance of a Bhikus, with hair already being shaved, a very fresh and smooth face without any wrinkle, wearing a bright orange sash, smiling happily. Mingguang asked him, "Grandpa, how come you are here?" His grandpa answered, smiling, "I came to tell you, I have already followed with Amitabha and been reborn in the Pure Land. Mingguang, you should vigorously recite Buddha's name, and follow with Amitabha Buddha."

The Story of Dr Chiang

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A talk by Alice Chiang on September 14, 2008

Dharma Master Yo asked me to share with you what Dr. Chiang and our family have gone through these past 5 months. Life is so very unpredictable! Just a few months ago, Dr. Chiang was at the peak of his medical practice. We were in the process of moving into a brand new house. It was his dream home. It's got everything he ever wanted built in it. The new house was surrounded by woods and lots of trees, which he loved. He was very excited about it. At the end of February and the beginning of March, we began to pack our valuables and important documents into boxes and move from our old house to the new one. His back then began to hurt. We thought he probably just pulled some muscles while lifting boxes and did not take too much notice of it. Well, the back pain got worse for the next two weeks and began to pinch the nerve, causing numbness of the left leg. He decided to get an MRI of the spine to make sure everything was okay.

I will never forget March 20th, Thursday, at 3 p.m. [Our son] Andy was still on his spring break. We all accompanied Dr. Chiang to have the MRI. As he came out of the test, he was wearing a smile on his face. Andy and I were relieved. But he then went on and told us that the radiologist had shown him the film, and he had seen a large tumor inside one of the vertebrae. Subsequently, a CT Scan confirmed that Dr. Chiang had stage IV lung cancer, which had already spread to the spine. It was so shocking and devastating for me! I didn't know what to do. The first thing that came to my mind was: what's going to happen to

all his patients? Who would be willing to cover for Dr. Chiang? And what's going to happen to his medical practice that he cares so very much about? Coincidentally, March 20th was also the day that we had just signed the contract to list our old house for sale. Even though Dr. Chiang was ailing, he went back to the office over the next two days, performed 15 endoscopies and colonoscopies, and saw 25 patients. He was still laughing and joking with the patients as if nothing had happened. But starting Sunday, three days after he was diagnosed, his condition continued deteriorating. He was in so much pain and couldn't get out of bed any more. After that, he was never able to go back to his office ever again.

Taking care of Dr. Chiang and bringing him to various tests/scans and treatment/therapy was already a full time job for me. But being his medical practice manager, I had to handle the transition of the patient care as well as the business and operation of the office, including finding a good physician to cover for Dr. Chiang as well as coordinating with pharmacies and other health care professionals.

In addition, I had to deal with selling the old house and eventually moving. To me, it was almost mission impossible! It was a tremendous and overwhelming burden for me. Being a Buddhist, it is very clear to me that this was karmic retribution appearing right in front of us. We were in this together. These karmic situations came chasing us like a huge hurricane and totally caught us off guard! I know this was the karma from Dr. Chiang's previous life, because in this life he was such a good, kindhearted man who had saved so many people's lives. So, I began to repent to the Buddha on Dr. Chiang's behalf and recite the Great Compassion Mantra vigorously, incorporating the recitation into my daily activities all day long. I know I was being

blessed by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Venerable Master Hua because in addition to the Dharma Masters' caring and support, all of a sudden I felt an enormous and irresistible power and strength in me at all times helping me overcome so many karmic obstacles.

Recently, Dr. Chiang did back surgery to remove the tumor in the vertebrae, four sessions of chemotherapy, and over 30 sessions of radiation treatment, yet the cancer cells continued to grow and to spread! I made many attempts to share the Buddhadharma with him using my own experience as an example. I also urged him to accept some alternative medicine and food therapy for body and mind healing, but I could never totally convince him. Being not only a physician but also biochemist and immunologist himself, Dr. Chiang was very skeptical of my advice.

In mid-July, Dr. Chiang was admitted to the hospital due to side effects from chemotherapy. He couldn't keep any food down and was constantly throwing up. His condition started gradually going downhill. A week later, his arms and legs were all swollen, and he lost his voice. The oncologist told us that it was about the time to put his hands in his pockets, as there was nothing he could do medically to help Dr. Chiang. When we were told Dr. Chiang only had weeks to live, he was surprisingly very calm. This was when I told him that only Buddhas and Bodhisattvas could save him now. I asked him to begin vigorously reciting Amitabha's name, and explained to him that the land of Ultimate Bliss is covered by gold and surrounded by so many treasures and that there will be no suffering, only enjoyment of every bliss. If he recited

Amitabha's name wholeheartedly, he would attain rebirth in the land of Ultimate Bliss. He agreed and began to do so. I told him that if he recited the Buddha's name one time, he would liberate

one cancer cell; if he recited 10,000 times, he'd liberate 10,000 cancer cells. He laughed. I went on and told him to recite with as much diligence as if his patients were very sick, and he needed to save their lives. He listened and acknowledged my words. He also took Dharma Master Yo's advice and agreed to take refuge with the Triple Jewel and receive the Five Precepts.

On July 27th, Dharma Master Yo and Dharma Master Jai along with disciple Kao came to visit Dr. Chiang in the hospital. Dr. Chiang took refuge with Venerable Master Hua and received the five precepts from Dharma Master Yo and Dharma Master Jai. Inconceivably, the very next day, the swelling of his arms and legs diminished! He looked so much healthier with pink cheeks. Not only did he begin to talk out loud but also he was able to start eating and keep the food down without vomiting! The oncologist was so stunned and amazed and couldn't figure out why. This gave Dr. Chiang so much confidence and encouragement. All of sudden, he was able to totally let go of his worries and be totally at ease. After that, he began reciting Buddha's name even more vigorously.

As we were thinking Dr. Chiang was stable enough to come home, he started to develop difficulty in breathing. His heart was pounding very fast. Coughing and fever complicated the condition. I knew the end was coming. Andy and I followed the Dharma Master's suggestion to recite along with him. A few times when I asked him whether he saw Amitabha coming, he nodded his head and said, "Yes!" Right before and after Dr. Chiang's passing, we did encounter a few incidences of interference from creditors of Dr. Chiang's previous lives. Andy will briefly describe what happened during and after Dr. Chiang's passing later. Although Dr. Chiang was seeking help of the Buddha at the very last minutes, he did have good roots, blessings, virtues, and

causal connections as described in The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra, and he was reciting Buddha's name so vigorously and wholeheartedly without confusion. Therefore, I believe he will attain rebirth in Amitabha's land of Ultimate Bliss. In his Dharma Talks, Venerable Master Hua often spoke of how sincerity brings a response that intertwines with the Way. It is truly an inconceivable phenomenon. I myself have felt and witnessed Buddhas and Bodhisattvas' compassion, wisdom, and boundless light shining on me during this most difficult time of my life. I would like to share a phrase with you which best describes what I went through during the past five months. The phrase is from Incense Praise: "If our hearts are sincere and earnest, all Buddhas will manifest."

A talk by Andy Chiang on September 14, 2008

My dad passed away on Saturday, August 16th, in the afternoon. Heading into that Thursday, August 14th, we knew that my dad was probably nearing the end of his life, so Mom and I made sure that we were in my dad's hospital room at all times. Around 3 p.m. on Friday, my mom and I had an appointment at the funeral home to discuss the arrangement. But pretty much right as we got back to the hospital from the funeral home around 6 p.m., my mom received a call from our home's security company. They called to tell us that the alarm system had gone off at home and to see if we were okay. Naturally, my mom told them that we hadn't been in the house since 2 p.m.; Therefore, it was really strange that the alarm went off around 6 p.m. ; This was the first time our alarm had ever gone off, so my mom was afraid someone had broken into our house. We decided to rush back home to make sure things were okay. We waited for two police cars to show up. When we opened the garage door, we noticed that the rear door to the house was open. The police went in the

house and checked every room and found no trace of anyone breaking in. When we were confident that our home was fine, my mom and I rushed back to the hospital to be with my dad. That night we were reciting the Amitabha Buddha's name all night long. When dad was listening to us reciting the Buddha's name, he would move his lips trying so hard to recite with us and often breaking into huge smiles. These smiles were different than his usual smiles—as if he were experiencing something he'd never experienced before. And indeed, when my mom asked him, "Did you see the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas?" he nodded to say yes. The next day, on the morning of the day that my dad passed away, he could not really move anything but his eyes. As we recited the Amitabha Buddha's name to him, I saw tears coming down from his eyes. That's how I knew he could hear me. So I was reciting even louder and more vigorously, because I knew the end was near.

My dad passed away that Saturday afternoon at 2:22 p.m. But just a few minutes before and after dad's passing, something very strange was happening. The intercom speaker kept coming on (at least three times), and the front desk nurse kept asking us, "How can I help you?" even though no one had pressed the emergency button. In fact, I had gotten so annoyed by it that I left my dad's room to go tell the front desk that we were trying to recite the Amitabha Buddha's name, and the intercom speaker kept distracting us. At 2:30 p.m., my mom asked the nurse to come in and unplug the IV machine. When dad passed away, his face froze in the suffering state he was in when he took his last breath. Our heartfelt thanks to so many of you who came to the hospital to help us recite Amitabha Buddha's name. After several hours of recitation, my dad's face began to change, even though he had died hours earlier. The suffering state of his mouth changed into a decidedly noticeable smile. It was unmistakable! I

was in absolute shock and awe at what I had seen. A little after 10 p.m. towards the end of the recitation of the Amitabha prayer, all of a sudden, the unplugged IV machine started beeping again as if it were on, for a few times in a row! (But it had been turned off for almost eight hours by that point!).

The next day, when I finally had a chance to think about all the incredible things that happened in the last two days, and I had a chance to talk to my mom about it, I was then able to make sense of everything. The rear door opening by itself, the hospital intercom speaker going off by itself, and the IV beeping after it had been turned off... This was all the work of enemy spirits that were trying to distract my family and I from focusing our attention on my dad as he was about to die. I understood then that these spirits were from my dad's past lives and were trying to keep us away from my dad. I realized that the smile from my dad's face even after he passed away was his way of communicating to us that he had found Amitabha, through the light that our prayers had created for him and that he would find his way to the Pure Land. My dad's eyes had closed, but he opened mine. Thank you very much.

Remembrance of My Father's Rebirth

By Kai Wen Lo

Translation By Laura Lin

Pure Sound From Silicon Valley

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June of this year, my father experienced sudden pain around his waist, and he couldn't eat. Within one month, he lost around ten kilograms. He was admitted to Taipei's General Veteran's Hospital many times. Finally, in September, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. According to his doctor, this type of cancer worsens very quickly. Usually, a patient with this illness only lives for another six months. Although my entire family didn't lose hope, we were finally defeated by the disease. My father peacefully passed away at the end of October. From when he first got ill to when he passed away, many inconceivable events as described in the Sutras occurred. Therefore, I put these events together to share with everyone.

1. The Six Principles formed the foundation of my father's faith:

My father was an introvert, he considered carefully before he acted, and he was a very responsible person. Ever since we were children, my father taught my brother, my sister, and me never take advantage of others and never flatter others to further our own benefits. Also, he taught us not to add to another person's burden. Because my father sincerely respected the Venerable Master Hua's merit and virtue, he took refuge with the

Venerable Master in 1994. From then on, my father recited the Earth Store Sutra, the Heart Sutra and the Buddha's name daily.

2. I constantly reminded my father to maintain his faith:

During my father's stay in the hospital, the suffering that he went through was beyond description. When he realized that his illness was incurable, he was determined to be reborn in the Pure Land. I put a recording of the Buddha's name next to my father's bedside, and it played continuously. I frequently described the scene of the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss to my father. I also told him that the relationships in the Saha world are temporary, only his Dharma companions in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss are permanent. One day when my father woke up, he felt a lot of pain. However, he saw a circle of yellow light about one foot in diameter on the ceiling. All of the sudden, he experienced comfort all over his body. Since then, his faith was even firmer.

3. Manifestation of negative karma could not be ignored:

Eight days before my father passed away, he dreamed that many people were chasing him to kill him. When he woke up, he was very disturbed. When my friend told me over the phone that the Three Thousand Buddhas Repentance was taking place at Taipei's Dharma Realm Buddhist Books Distribution Society, my family rushed over and set up a "Plaque to Repay Those We Owe" on behalf of my father. The next day, my father dreamed that there was an individual who blocked those who were trying to kill him. On the third day, in his dreams, my father saw that his intended killers had smiles on their faces and appeared to be joyful, and they stopped seeking retribution from him. My father's experience was similar to the teachings in the Earth Store Sutra

where it describes what a person experiences before he passes away. Everyone should be mindful of this.

4. Letting go of everything and passing away amid recitation of the Buddha's name:

On October 25, my father's illness worsened very quickly. Following my mother's reminder, my father even used his very hoarse voice to call out Amitabha Buddha's name two hours before his passing. It was incredibly touching! I told my father not to worry about the family, to let go of everything, and to concentrate on reciting the Buddha's name in his mind. At that time, my entire family started to recite the Buddha's name. When I saw my father's last breath, it was as if a knife cut my heart while it broke into thousands of pieces, and I felt as if there were explosions all around me. However, I remembered the words of Great Master Yin Kuang, so I continued to recite the Buddha's name with tears in my eyes. Under the compassionate assistance of Dharma Masters Heng Yun, Heng Tsai and others, the Dharma brothers of Dharma Realms Buddhist Books Distribution Society were contacted right away. They were very organized and took turns to recite the Buddha's name on my father's behalf. Due to their efforts, my father reached the Western Pure Land smoothly, and my family is deeply grateful.

5. Amitabha Buddha appeared and radiated thousands of rays of golden light:

When my family started to recite the Buddha's name, my younger brother smelled the scent of fragrant flowers in the hospital room, and my younger sister saw Amitabha Buddha manifesting an incredibly large body from afar while emitting golden light. Even

more surprisingly, she saw our father walking slowly towards Amitabha. At that time, my sister thought there was something wrong with her, so she left the room to get a drink of water and to take deep breaths. When she went back to the room and closed her eyes to resume her recitation, the scene she saw earlier returned. Our father was closer to Amitabha, and he appeared to be getting smaller. My sister left the room again to get a drink of water and to take deep breaths. When she returned to the room, she saw my father's hair fell off, and he was wearing a black robe as he got on a lotus to leave. What is also worth mentioning is my sister's description of Amitabha. She said the Buddha's head is the color of loyal blue and he had many flesh mounds on the crown of his head. She also said that our father appeared to be very small next to Amitabha. Two days after my father's passing, my sister continued to smell wondrous fragrance. My brother and sister are not true Buddhist disciples. They know very little about Amitabha and the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Without the kindness and compassion of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, my brother and sister would not have experienced such auspicious states.

**Recommended Resource: Ven Hai Xian
(1901-2013) Pure Land Rebirth Documentary
(English subtitles):**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoritpHKxm4>

**Public Domain English biography booklet available
here: <https://www.scribd.com/user/269920848/bc1993>**

Living Will

To my family and all those concerned with my care:

I, _____, of

being of sound mind, make this statement as a directive to be followed if for any reason I become unable to participate in decisions regarding my medical care.

Upon my death and transition into the next life, I do not wish to be reborn into the ghost kingdom or the animal kingdom. I do not wish to suffer. Instead, I wish to follow Amitabha Buddha and to arrive at his Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. To all my family and friends, I wish to ask for your assistance so that I may not suffer, but instead remain calm and peaceful to prepare for my arrival to the Western Pure Land.

In the event that I should suffer from a terminal illness to the extent that doctors foresee no possible recovery, I ask that no medical treatment be undertaken. Should I already be in the hospital at this point, I wish to be checked out and brought back home. Please notify my assigned family member or friend _____ at telephone number(s) _____ and _____.

Once home, please position me in the most comfortable, natural position in which I may rest. The assigned family member or friend will lead others in chanting “Amituofo.”

Should I decline to the point where I lose consciousness and am no longer aware of my surroundings, the assigned family member or friend shall have full authority in making any decisions regarding my well-being. If

this person cannot be contacted, please find a Buddhist master or Buddhist believer to aid in the chanting of “Amitufo” until the assigned person can be reached.

Within twenty-four hours prior to and after my death, I would like to ask my friends and family to comply with the following:

1. Do not touch or move my body or even my bed.
2. Do not change my clothing.
3. Do not place dry ice or other substances on my body. Sandalwood incense may be burned to if there is any odor.
4. Do not let a breeze to blow directly onto my body.
5. Do not allow the scent of alcohol, onion, scallion, garlic, or chives to enter the room.
6. Do not smoke, cry, or talk in the room.

My purpose for asking this is to create an atmosphere in which I may remain calm and at peace. The only sound I wish to hear is “Amitufo,” so that he may escort me to the Pure Land. If I am at home upon my death, my family should take turns chanting “Amitufo” for eight to twenty-four hours. At this point, I am ready to be moved, washed, and dressed. This period of chanting is the best time to assist me to be calm and peaceful. All funeral arrangements can be set up afterwards. If I should pass away in the hospital, please follow hospital policy and chant as much as is allowed.

During my terminal illness and within forty-nine days after my death, all family members should adopt a vegetarian diet. I do not wish for any killing to be associated with my death. All funeral offerings must be vegetarian. The use of alcohol is strictly prohibited. Funeral arrangements should be kept simple and proper Buddhist etiquette should be followed. I do not wish for any unnecessary excess.

Within forty-nine days following my death, I sincerely ask my family members and friends to seek my rebirth into the Pure Land, and to perform good deeds such as giving offerings to the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, printing sutras, helping the needy, and so on. These good deeds will help me to attain additional good karma, and

further assist me in arriving at the Pure Land. Most important is for my family to sincerely chant “Amituofo.”

In order for me to benefit the most and to peacefully arrive at the Pure Land, the above points must be followed. This will not only benefit me but all those involved as well. In this manner, I wish for everyone to learn and to believe in Buddhism. Thus, everyone can arrive at the Pure Land, as well.

Amituofo to all.

These directions express my legal right to request or refuse treatment. Therefore, I expect my family, doctor, and all those concerned with my care to regard themselves as legally and morally bound to act in accord with my wishes.

Signed_____

Date_____

Witness: I declare that the person who signed this document, or asked another to sign this document on his or her behalf, did so in my presence and that he or she appears to be of sound mind and free of duress or undue influence.

Witness_____

Date_____

Note: This example of “Living Will” is translated by the Amitabha Buddhist Society of Philadelphia.